



Department of Child Support Services (DCSS)

Child Support Order Demystified

Anne Chen, Child Support Attorney III

Child support is often a mystery to individuals who have never had to deal with child support. The Department of Child Support (DCSS) provides services to the community to assist with determining paternity, establishing and enforcing child support obligations, and assisting family in meeting the financial needs of their children. Each county has their own child support locations to serve their community.

There are several ways a child support case may be initiated. Either parent may request a case be opened with DCSS. DCSS can either enforce a support order that has already been established in another county, state, or country or DCSS can modify that support amount, when appropriate. If there is not a current order for child support, DCSS will initiate proceedings in the local Child Support Court to determine paternity, if necessary, and establish a fair and accurate child support order. Another way a child support case can be initiated is when an individual is receiving public assistance to support the needs of the child/children. This individual can be either a parent, another care provider (such as a relative), or the child is in foster care. These are called IV-D cases. Lastly, another state may contact the local DCSS office to assist with initiating a case or enforcing or modifying an existing order. This usually occurs when the custodial parent is residing in another state and the non-custodial parent is residing in that local DCSS's county.

Have you ever wondered how the amount of child support is calculated? In California, a Guideline Calculation was created to assist Courts in setting a fair child support amount. Each state has their own variation of the Guideline Calculation. The guideline calculator is a mathematical tool which takes into consideration information from both the custodial parent and the non-custodial parent, such as income, amount of visitation each parent has with the child/children, tax filing settings, the number of additional biological or adopted children in the home, cost of health insurance, etc. and calculates a fair and accurate support amount based on the information provided by the parents and/or other sources. Typically, the most important of these factors that will greatly impact the monthly child support amount is the income of each of the parties and visitation each parent has with the children.

If there are multiple children on a case, the guideline calculation allocates or divides up the monthly support amount for each child. The monthly child support amount provides the

continued on next page...



Department of Child Support Services (DCSS)

Child Support Order Demystified

Anne Chen, Child Support Attorney III

greatest amount of support for the youngest child, and decreasing amounts for each of the older children. As the children emancipate, reaches the age of 18 or 19 if they have not graduated high school by age 18, the child support amount is automatically reduced according to this allocation.

Once the Court orders a child support obligation DCSS enforces that court order. Typically a wage garnishment is sent to the paying parent's place of employment. Once monies are received, it is processed through the State Disbursement Unit (SDU). SDU will send out funds to the receiving parent either through checks or electronic cards, similar to debit cards. In IV-D cases, the first \$50 of monies received is provided to the receiving parent and the remainder is paid to the county for reimbursement of the public assistance the receiving parent has received.

Child support may be used to provide food, clothing, shelter, medical care, educational fees, transportation and child care for the child/children. DCSS works closely with the parent paying support and the person receiving support to ensure that all of the relevant information is considered in determining the appropriate child support order so that both parents participate in providing the financial support of their children. If you are interested in more information or assistance with child support or child support calculations, please contact your local child support agency or visit www.childsup.ca.gov.